Project I.D. No169

NAME: Mori, Yae DATE OF BIRTH: 1900 PLACE OF BIRTH: Osaka
Age: 77 Sex: F Marital Status: W Education: Jr. High school

PRE-WAR:
Date of arrival in U.S.: 1923 Age: 23 M.S. M Port of entry: San Fran.
Occupation/s: 1. Tailor's wife 2. Dry cleaner 3. _____
Place of residence: 1. Berkeley 2. _____ 3. _____
Religious affiliation: Christian church
Community organizations/activities: _____

EVACUATION:
Name of assembly center: Tanforan
Name of relocation center: Topaz, Utah
Dispensation of property: Left everything behind Names of bank/s: _____
Jobs held in camp: 1. _____ 2. _____
Jobs held outside of camp: _____
Left camp to go to: _____

POST-WAR:
Date returned to West Coast: Sep. '45
Address/es: 1. Oakland 2. _____
3. _____
Religious affiliation: Christian church
Activities: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
If deceased, date, place and age at time of death: Husband died in '42.

Name of interviewer: Takarabe Date: 1/23/77 Place: San Francisco
Translator: Mabel Seeli

Q: When were you born:

A: I was born in 1900.

Q: Are you 77 years old now?

A: Yes, I am 77 years old this year.

Q: Are you from Osaka?

A: Yes, I am.

Q: Are there many people from Osaka here?

A: No, I don't hear about people from Osaka. There are many people from Hiroshima and Wakayama, but not too many people from Osaka.

Q: What was the occupation of your family?

A: My father was in printing business in Osaka. He did the printing for churches. Of course both my parents were members of Temma Church in Osaka, and my father served as a decon for many years. He was in printing business hiring young apprentices in his shop. We were not rich. I had 2 older brothers and an older sister, and I was the youngest of the four. When my brother was around 12 or 13, my father got in finanacial difficulties, so he sent my brother out to Tokyo to work as a shopboy at a bookstore. My father continued his business, but as he was a serious man and was not good at business he finally closed the shop and moved to a small place, and worked as a foreman in a printing company.

When I graduated from the grammar school I was ready to go to a girls' highschool, but my father told me that he could not let me go to a girls' highschool after sending out my brother to apprenticeship, so I went to a junior highschool thinking I could go to a highschool after graduating from the junior highschool. However, when I graduated from the junior hishgschool my brother wanted me to go to Tokyo and help him as his wife was ill. I went to Tokyo when I was 16 years old. Since then I lived in Tokyo.

Q: Did you stay home?

A: Yes, I stayed at my brother's home. I wanted to go to school very badly. In those days there was a correspondence course, so I studied it to get ready for the girls' highschool, but I did not have a chance to go to school, and I was asked in marriage. My mother's cousin was a pastor of Bancho Church in Kojimachi, Tokyo for many years. He used to come to America often as a peace representative before the war, and he told me about my husband. I could not have come to America after 1924, so in fall of 1923 my husband went back to Japan, and we were married in my uncle's church in Tokyo. Then we came to America together. I have been a member of the ~~Methodist~~ Congregational church. An old member of the ~~Methodist~~ Congregational church here is the one who took my husband back to Japan to look for a bride. He was going to introduce his niece as a wife, but she was already married, so he asked my uncle who was a pastor if he knew someone who would go to America as a bride, and they started talking about me, and we were married.

Q: How old was your husband when you got married?

A: He was 29 and I was 23. My husband was a tailor in Berkeley. I did housework in a white family for about a month as I wanted to see a white family. Before I came to America I learned English from my aunt who was a highschool teacher so I could understand English a little. That was the only time I worked in a white family. After my husband quit the tailoring business he started a dry cleaning business.

Q: When was that?

A: It was from around 1930 till the war broke out.

Q: Did the Depression come when he was in tailor business?

A: No, he was in dry cleaning business then. He started the dry cleaning business in 1929, and the Depression started around 1930.

Q: Were you badly off then?

A: Yes, we were, but we got some installment money back, so we had some spending money. We could take only what we could carry with our hands when we went to camp. We left everything in the store, pressers and customers' clothes and everything else.

Q: Couldn't you sell them?

A: No, we couldn't sell them.

Q: Was it because they knew you were leaving?

A: Yes, but nobody wanted to buy them, and even if they did they would pay almost nothing, so it was better to leave them there.

Q: Did you go to Tanforan first?

A: Yes, we did. We had 3 daughters, so we could live in a new barracks and not in the stable. The floor was made of coarse boards so weeds and insects crawled through the cracks in the floors and it was unpleasant, but we were better off than those in the stables.

Q: Why did your husband quit the tailoring business?

A: I think he could not make the ends meet by tailoring business. The other reason was that he was asked to buy a dry cleaning business from a man who was going back to Japan. As he did not have any experience in the dry cleaning business he could not make money, and we lived from hand to mouth.

Q: Was there any big incident in your family?

A: Yes. When our oldest son was 2 years old he had convulsion from high fever and died. We called a doctor, who put the baby in a tub of hot water and then in cold water, but he died. It was a heart-breaking experience.

Q: When was that?

A: It was in 1925. At that time I was pregnant with a daughter. About 4 months after our son died, the daughter was born. She is 51 years old and is married to a man who owns a hardware store in San Francisco.

Q: How many children do you have altogether?

A: I have 3 daughters who were born after I lost my son.

Q: Are they all girls?

A: Yes, they are. They were born 5 years apart. The oldest daughter is in San Francisco, and the second daughter is in San Jose. The third daughter is married and lives in Los Angeles.

Q: Do you have any recollection of the time you went to Tanforan Center?

A: At Tanforan there was a regulation that one member of the family had to work/ My husband was in the hospital with heart trouble, and I had stomach trouble, so our daughter worked in the kitchen as a waitress.

Q: When there were so many Japanese together, didn't some people become rough?

A: Yes. There was a group of people who believed Japan was winning the war. When aeroplanes flew overhead they said Japanese are coming. Those people were sent to Tule Lake.

Q: Did you go to Topaz from the beginning?

A: Yes, we did. We went from Tanforan to Topaz.

Q: Wasn't Topaz a sandy place?

A: Yes, it was in the desert. It was desert as far as we could see. After about 3 days train ride they let us off in the middle of the desert. I was scared when I saw such a big desert in America. They pulled the shades on the windows and did not let us see outside when the trains went through cities. We could see out in the desert.

Q: Did you think your life was in danger in the camp?

A: Yes, not only when we went to the camp, but when the war broke out, truckloads of soldiers passed by, and there was uneasy feeling. I thought Japan had started a terrible thing. My husband came here as a yobiyose since his father was in America. He was like a Nisei rather than an Issei, so he did not think that Japan was going to win the war, but he did not say that because he could have got in trouble if he did.

Q: Didn't you think Japan would win the war?

A: I am a woman but I knew a little about America, so I thought Japan had done a reckless thing. As I was brought up in a Christian family I knew about America a little better than other people. After the war my husband died, so I bought a dry cleaning business from Mr. Takahashi and managed it alone for 10 years.

Q: When was the hardest time for you?

A: It was when I was operating a dry cleaning store alone. I felt like crying.

Q: Were your daughters all grown up when you came home from the camp?

A: Yes, the oldest daughter was married, but the youngest one was 15 years old when my husband died.

Q: Then you brought her up alone, didn't you?

A: Yes. After graduating from highschool she got a scholarship from an art school in Oakland, and studied there. Her teacher said she had talent for art, and she liked art, so she went to the school.

Q: Were you an agent in cleaning business?

A: Yes, I was. When the customers bring clothes, I tag them and leave them in bundles. Then Mr. Takahashi's cleaner pick them up, clean them and bring them back. I do alteration if needed, check the clothes and give them to the customers.

Q: Wasn't Mr. Takahashi not in cleaning business after he came back from the camp?

A: No, he wasn't, but his son was. His son was going into something else, so I bought the business. We have been associating with the Takahashis for over 50 years.

Q: How many years did you contunue the cleaning business?

A: Nearly 10 years. Then I got gallstone. After an operation I quit the business. As my daughter was married and was living in San Francisco, I moved to San Francisco and rented an apartment.

Q: Did you retire since then?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: What year did you come back from the camp?

A: We left the camp as soon as the war was over.

Q: Did you come back right away?

A: The war ended on August 15, and we left there the following month. As our older daughter got a scholarship in a college in Cleveland, Ohio, we wondered if we should go there or go back to East Bay. As the weather was not good in the East, and as my husband's health was not good we thought it was better to go back to East Bay rather than going to a strange place. We went back to Oakland and stayed at the dormitory of a church. My husband got a job at a white tailor shop, and I did some domestic work at a white family.

Q: Was your husband still alive then?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: When did he die?

A: He died when he was 49 and I was 42 then. Many people had hard time during the war. I think people in Japan had harder times.

Q: Did you start the dry cleaning business after your husband die?

A: Yes, I did. The pastor of the church told me that Mr. Takahashi was looking for someone to take over his business, and since I was in dry cleaning business before, asked me if I would like to try. I bought the right to the business and started it. I worked from 8 in the morning till 6 in the afternoon, Mondays through Saturday without any rest.

Q: Were you engaged by the time your husband went back to Japan to get married?

A: No, I didn't know him. I wanted to come to America. The daughter of the pastor who arranged the marriage for me was married and lived in Los Angeles, so I knew about America and liked America better than Japan. I think that is why my uncle brought the marriage proposal from America to me.

Q: Are you glad you came to America?

A: I wanted to come here, so I think it was good that I came here. I went back to Japan after 39 years, then 4 years ago and again last month. I went back to Japan 3 times. I am glad I lived in America. I think The life in America suits me better.

Q: Have you ever had any unpleasant experience with the white people?

A: As my father was in printing business when I was little, foreign teachers from mission schools used to come to our shop. I used to call their names and greeted them, so I guess I was used to the white people. I never had ill feeling toward the white people.

Q: Did you think it was unfair that you had to be evacuated or did you think it was right?

A: I think it was unfair. I thought Japan's action was reasonable.

Q: Why did you think so?

A: At that time I was excited and could not think rationally, but later I thought America challenged Japan to fight and Japan was forced to fight.

Q: What did you think about being put in a camp?

A: They fed us rice and other food suitable for Japanese. We were given plenty of food which was hard to get outside, so I think we were better off in the camp than outside.

Q: What was your opinion on loyalty?

A: I acquired the American citizenship and became an American, but I don't think a Japanese canot become completely an American. Of course, we have to do our duty as a citizen in our daily lives. I am a Japanese so I have a Japanese spirit.

Q: Were you questioned on the loyalty in the camp?

A: Yes, we were.

Q: How did your feel about it then?

A: I had a lonely feeling, but as long as we live in America I thought we had to be loyal to America.

Q: Did your children have dual citizenship, or were they Americans?

A: Of course they were Americans. They are girls, so I don't think they have troubles like boys do.

Q: Were there many people in the camp who caused troubles?

A: Yes, there were. They were transfered to Tule Lake to go back to Japan, but they are back here. Recently there is a dispute going on concerning Iva Toguri's American citizenship. I think citizenship is a very important issue.

Q: Were there many books at your house?

A: I think there were. As my father closed his store when I was in my teens, I didn't see too many books.

Q: Did you study about Ninomiya Kinjiro when you were in school?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Was your father the first generation Christian?

A: Yes, but my mother was the second generation Christian. Mother's mother was a Christian. I think my father became a Christian after he married mother. I didn't know about it until Mr. Uchida brought back from Japan a book about 100 Japanese Christians , and I found my grandmother's name in it.

Q: Was America different from what you were imagining when you were in Japan?

A: I did not feel any amazing difference. As I was born and raised in the city, the buildings and customs were not like those in the country. I was amazed by the spaciousness in America, but otherwise I did not feel too much difference from Tokyo. As I was brought up as a Christian since my Sunday school days I did not have strong faith as those who have converted to Christianity from Buddhism, but I have a strong feeling which cannot be extinguished deep in my heart. Last October and November I went to Kyushu with a church group and visited where 26 saits were matyred and other historical sites of early Chritianity. When I thought about the strong faith of olden day Christians I felt pain deep in my heart.

Q: Did you stop over at Hawaii on your way here?

A: Yes, we did, and we went ashore there. The name of the ship was Senyo Maru and it took 17 days. I was seasick and could not get up until we reached Hawaii. Japanese food was served only to the first class passengers, and the second and the third passengers were served Western-style food. As I could not get up, my husband brought some Japanese food from the first class dinning room to me. Funny thing is that as soon as you stand on the ground, your seasick is gone. Most Isseis had a hard time as we did not understand the language.

Q: Do you belong to any organizations such as Japanese Association?

A: No. As my husband was like a Nisei, he did not send our children to a Japanese language school, but had a tutor teach them Japanese. He did not belong to any organization such as kenjin-kai. He belonged just to the church and no other organization.

Q: Did you belong to the kenjin-kai, Mrs. Takahashi?

A: No, we didn't.

Q: Aren't there kenjin-kai around here?

A: Yes, there are. There are Hiroshima Kenjin-kai, Wakayama kenjin-kai and another one.

Q: Are they very popular?

A: Yes. I read in newspaper that they hold New Years party and other gatherings.

T: Christians do not go to such places too much, I think.

M: I don't think they do.

T: I guess there is no need for them.

M: I think so. We do some social work at our church. Most of the members are Buddhists.

Mrs. Takahashi: I think we should join those organizations and tell them about Christianity.

Q: There wasn't any segregated school around here, wasn't there?

A: No, there wasn't. Our children attended public schools. There might have been one long time ago.

Q: Have many Japanese been living in El Cerito and Albany since olden days?

A: No, there were no Japanese around here. Many Japanese live here now.

Q: Where did they live before?

A: They lived around 6th and 7th Streets in Oakland, and San Francisco,

Q: Where did you have your business in Oakland?

A: On the 7th Street.

Q: When did your husband quit the tailor business?

A: Soon after we got married.

Q: Did he start the dry cleaning business right after that?

A: Yes, he did.

Q: How long did he continue the business?

A: For 15 years until the war started.

Q: What kind of headaches did you have in dry cleaning business?

A: Pressing was hard. Men's suits had a certain ways of pressing, but there are different styles of deresses. In those days pleats were popular. We had to pin each pleat and press them, so it was hard.

M: Nowadays Niseis can work in banks and offices, but in olden days Japanese could not get into those places so there was nothing for them to do except domestic work.

Q: Have you ever make any mistakes while you were in cleaning business?

A: We did not make any special mistake. When I was operating a dry cleaning agency alone I was asked to dye a jacket so I sent it out to a dye house. There is no guarantee when you send clothes out to dye as they might shrink. When the jacket came back from the dye house it was shrunk, so the customer was angry. As my husband was a tailor and I knew how to sew, I bought some material and sewed a jacket to make up for his loss.

Q: Didn't the customer pay you?

A: Of course he didn't. I had a hard time then, and was very angry. At one time a case was brought before the court, and I had to ask Mrs. Takahashi's son to go to the court with me. That was the first time I went to a court.

Q: What happened then?

A: It ended without losing too much money.

Q: What did you do?

A: I think I lost something. The customer wouldn't listen to my excuse. I think that is how I got the gallstone. I had to do the bookkeeping and everything else all by myself. I went to church on Sundays, and sometimes there were meeting in the afternoon. I worked hard from Monday to Saturday. I did it for almost 10 years without any rest,

Q: Did you have an operation on the gallstone?

A: Yes, I did. Since then I became well. Of course I retired since then.

Q: When was that?

A: It was in 1972.

Q: Then it has been only a few years since you retired, hasn't it?

A: No, it wasn't 1972. Anyway it was 10 years after I started the dry cleaning business that I became ill.

Q: When did you retire?

A: When I was 62 years old. I like sewing, so I sew dresses for my friends at home. I live in San Francisco now, and I have been attending this church ever since it was built 10 years ago.

Q: Have you been attending this church since you came here in 1923?

A: Yes. There is a Congregational church in Fresno, but this in the only Congregational church in East Bay. In San Francisco there are Japanese Methodist church, Presbyterian church and Seventh Day Adventists church.

No record of the rest